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Air's Clean In New Zealand; Those With Lung Cancer Come From Smoggy England

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A New Zealand physician has discovered that air pollution apparently caused three times as much lung cancer among British emigrants to his country as exists among native-born New Zealanders.

The findings, to be presented publicly for the first time in the United States at a special symposum on "The Air We Breathe" this weekend at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, may serve to reawaken the controversy over cause of lung cancer.

The physician, Dr. David Eastcott, said his studies cover 15 years, and are based upon findings confirmed in two five-year studies within that time.

They show, he said, that among former residents of the United Kingdom, lung cancer is 75 per cent higher than among native New Zealanders if they are over the age of 30.

Those who come to New Zealand from Great Britain before 30 have a corresponding decrease in their chances of getting lung cancer, he said.

Dr. Eastcott, then working for the National Health Institute of New Zealand, recorded deaths from lung cancer or "certain" lung cancer cases among a group of 250,000 immigrants to New Zealand who came only from England.

(England is the largest single exporter of new residents to the South Pacific island nation.)

He also checked the same disease among the entire population of New Zealand—about 2,500,000 persons.

His first study, made from 1949-51, was confirmed by a second five-year study, which showed the same ratio.

Since New Zealand has practically no air pollution—it has no industrial smog and is swept clean by strong winds—the only factor Dr. Eastcott was able to point to as a culprit in the difference in death rates was the smoky air of Britain, loaded with coal dust and hydrocarbon chemicals.

He hastened to point out, however, that the smog of Los Angeles and many American cities is composed of other chemicals. Too wide an inference cannot be drawn from his studies, he said.

"I do conclude from the study that at least half of the lung cancer cases in the study were due to air pollution," Eastcott said.

A continuing battle has raged between scientists over how important air pollution is in lung cancer. Current thinking in the United States is now generally of the opinion that cigarette smoking has an important—perhaps the most important—effect on lung cancer.

Coincidentially, the symposium at which Eastcott is to be a speaker is co-sponsored by the Tobacco Industry Research Committee, a group set up by the tobacco industry after the lung cancer reports about the dangers of cigarette smoking.

The committee, according to the University of California Medical School, the other co-sponsor, gave $28,000 for assistance to the symposium "with no strings attached."

Other speakers at the meeting, which opens Saturday noon, will include nuclear physicists Dr. Harold Urey; Benjamin Linsky, executive director of the Bay Area Air Pollution Control District; Jethro Gough, a member of the staff of the Welsh National School of Medicine, and Capt. Albert R. Behnke, former director of the U.S. Naval Radiation Defense Laboratory, San Francisco.

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